The most terrible of all terrors

While they’re eating, Mary shares her concern with William. “Hugh brought some bad news from Winchester. Apparently there’s a plague sweeping through Europe. What if it comes to our village? What about the children?” “Relax Mary” William replied. “Hugh always has his adventurous stories from other villages”. “But what if it’s true?” Mary exclaimed. “What if the plague really is coming? Nothing can stop it, not even the church!” As William looked over at his kids, his youngest son, Bert, began to cough. However, the coughing soon seized and the room was silent again. William, not wanting to worry Mary, assured her it was just a mild cough. But, somehow he knew something wasn’t right about that cough.

The next morning, early in the day, William visited the baker, Robin Meyers. He got his weekly bread, but noticed Robin had a worried look on his face. “My son was coughing a lot last night” Robin said. “I’m scared he might have the plague Hugh was talking about”. “You believe him too?” William Replied. “I don’t believe him, but there’s no harm in being cautious” “Guess not” With that, William left. On his way back to his home, he noticed there were fewer people in the street than usual. Most doors were shut and inside, he imagined people were praying for god to spare the village. He still didn’t believe the plague would catch on.

When William got home, he found his wife slouching over his children’s bed. He went to her side and what he saw astonished him. Bert was laying on the straw bed, with black lumps the size of chicken eggs under his arms. When he touched one of them, Bert winched in pain. He then started coughing. They smelled awful and the smell was making him sick. William realized the plague might be real after all. He left his wife to tend his son and went to get the priest.

As he was walking through town, more doors were closed and he began hearing people coughing inside their homes. He arrived at the church and searched for priest Brisky. He found him inside the church, praying. He waited until the priest had finished praying and then approached him. “Father, my son, Bert, is ill” he said “I think it might be the plague Hugh was talking about”. The priest stood and turned to face William. “Let’s pray for him” and so they prayed. They prayed for forgiveness, for pity and for protection. William went to sleep that night, listening to both his son and Mary coughing and moaning in pain.

The next morning, the bells rang for a service. William and his two sons went to church, while his wife and third son stayed at home. When they arrived, the church was packed. The whole village was there. In the front sat the richer and in the back stood the poor. Brisky was taking the service that morning. “I have news of a terrible sickness, a plague spreading throughout Europe. I encourage you to protect your children, your family and your loved ones. This plague is god’s punishment, for we have sinned. We must seek forgiveness of the lord and maybe he will spare our village. Let us pray”. They all bowed their heads and prayed.

After the service, William sent his boys home and everyone was discussing what caused the plague. Some people agreed with the priest and thought it was god’s punishment. Others, thought it was wizardry. There was even those who thought it was the end of the world. There was a very loud discussion, until someone shouted "The witch did it! It's her work!". The church went silent.

"What witch?" someone in the crowd asked. "Mad Agnes, the witch down the road. It must be her work. She's never liked people in the first place." People seemed to consider this option and most agreed that it was the work of Mad Agnes "It must be her". "What shall we do?" "Let's stone her!" One of the peasants shouted. Everyone gave a cheer and agreed. Most of the town watched as Mad Agnes was stoned outside of her home.

William returned home with many thoughts in his head. He didn't believe the simply killing the witch would stop the plague. In a way, he felt it wasn't her work in the first place. There was a foul smell as he stepped inside. Bert was laying in the hay, covered in his own vomit. Mary was still sitting next to him, telling him he was going to be okay. Somehow William knew it wasn't going to be okay, but he kept his thought to himself.

There wasn't much small talk at the fireplace that afternoon. Mary was starting to get a cough. Bert was still laying in the hay with a fever, reeking of vomit. William had sent his two elder boys to stay with his uncle, who he was sure did not have the plague. That night him and Mary prayed.

When William woke up the next morning, Mary had the black lumps as well. She was still sleeping and he worried for she woke up and saw. Bert had also gotten worse. He had dark blotches all over him, like he was bleeding under his skin. William left the house before either of them woke. He wanted to see how the rest of the town was doing.

The streets were starting to smell like his home. They stank of vomit and everywhere you could hear the peasants coughing and moaning in pain. He went to the market and saw that only a few booths were open. He could hear the traders chatting; "This plague is killing off my whole family" "Yes, it's horrible. Have they found a cure yet?" "Not that I know of, but according to the doctor, holding a frog to the lumps would take care of it. I don't believe any of it though. They're getting desperate for cures. Someone even tried putting their own feces on it. As far as I know, it didn't work." "I've heard of similar treatments, but none of them seem to work. Someone said to cook some onions and mix them with yeast and butter, then put it on the swellings with some figs. It's all shenanigans."

William heard similar conversations as he walked through town, but no one knew of a cure that worked. He stopped by the church to say a prayer and to receive blessings for him and his family.

Throughout the town, the story was the same. People were getting sick, everyone with the same symptoms. First black lumps appear under their arms and/or their groin. Then they develop a fever and start vomiting. Then they would start bleeding under the skin. The next day, they would randomly spasm attacks like Bert had when William came home from his walk. No one knew how or why the plague came and no one had a cure for it. They were all suffering and most people were leaving the town.

William woke up to find Bert lying lifeless on the hay. It didn't take long for him to realize the plague had taken him. He knew Mary was next and then him. William also worried about his elder boys. He hoped his uncle had taken them out of the village, somewhere safe. By now, Mary had started bleeding underneath her skin and she was lying in her bed. William was feeling terribly ill and was vomiting. He realized there was nothing he could do. They were doomed.

Mary passed away the next day, after the spasm like Bert had. William was the only one left in his house. The black patches under his skin had started to appear. He tried to find a frog, but he had no energy to do so. He prayed and lay down on his bed.

William woke in the middle of the night. He was suffering spasms and was in terrible pain. After what felt like hours of intense pain, something odd happened. The black lumps burst and black liquid oozed out. This eased his pain, but he didn't move. He waited till it was light again.

Just as the sun was rising, William got up and went outside. He was feeling a lot better. All around town lay dead bodies and burned corpses. The whole village was deserted. The air smelled foul and sour. He didn't know what to do.

William decided to check his uncles house to see if they made it out of village. However, when he got there, he found his two sons and uncle in a pile outside of the house. Dead. William realized he was the only one left of his family. He felt lonely.

After searching the village for survivors, William had found a group of people that were planning a revolution. They knew they could get something out of the plague. They were the only workforce left, so they could do what they wanted and demand what they wanted. The lord was still alive, because he had hid inside his mansion when the news of the plague came to town. They demanded more land and higher salaries. The lord saw no way out and gave them what they wanted.